

Remarks of United States Senator John O. Pastore  
at the launching of the nuclear submarine NARWHAL  
in Groton, Connecticut, Saturday, September 9, 1967

*note page 3*

I have come to this day and moment with pride -- pride in the workers whose skills have made this splendid nuclear submarine possible.

Pride in the nobility of purpose of the crew -- men of courage who will guide this ship through the silent depths of the ocean -- alone and unafraid.

This ceremony which marks the launching of the NARWHAL, the SSN671, is a milestone in the annals of our submarine history. Just thirteen short years ago the world's first nuclear submarine, the NAUTILUS, designated SSN571, was launched from this same shipyard. Here we are a hundred submarines later, and of these, ninety-two have been nuclear powered. Only men of great foresight would have envisioned this tremendous accomplishment.

I can think of no other important technological advancement which has progressed as rapidly as has the use of nuclear propulsion for naval vessels.

It was not too long ago from this shipyard that the forty-first and last POLARIS missile firing submarine was launched, marking the completion of this program. There is little doubt that the POLARIS submarine represents our most formidable deterrent to an all-out war.

I must say that these achievements would not have taken place except for the persistent and aggressive support of the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy -- with the help of Admiral Rickover and his associates -- and I would want you all to know further that if world conditions persist in the way they are today, the Joint Committee expects to see many more nuclear submarines launched from these and other ways throughout this great Nation.

Now, however, we have come to the crossroads in the development of nuclear-powered submarines. With the present authorized POLARIS program completed, we must give serious consideration to a further expansion of this program and we must intensify our efforts to develop new and more advanced nuclear attack submarines to meet the expanding challenge of Soviet naval power and the new Chinese threat. I also believe that we should actively pursue the replacement of all our conventional submarines with nuclear submarines of advanced design.

-2-

We have developed an irreplaceable reservoir of highly skilled men, such as I see before me today, who have been largely responsible for the clear supremacy the United States holds over any nation in the world in the development of nuclear submarines. Many of you workers, I might add, are friends from Rhode Island who journey here each day to join in this great endeavor to strengthen our national security.

We should insure that the great skills and capabilities of the men who design and build our nuclear warships should not be dissipated.

But this is only one aspect of the continuing fight for American nuclear propulsion supremacy.

The nuclear-powered aircraft carrier ENTERPRISE has just returned from its second deployment in action off Vietnam. The ENTERPRISE has proven so effective in battle in Vietnam that the Secretary of Defense requested a new nuclear-powered carrier in last year's defense bill and has told Congress that he intends to ask for one more next year and another in a future year.

The nuclear-powered carrier approved by Congress last year has been named the NIMITZ after the late Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz. You might be interested to know that about fifty-five years ago Lieutenant Nimitz was Commanding Officer of the first United States submarine NARWHAL, the predecessor of the nuclear submarine we are launching today.

The Joint Committee on Atomic Energy is proud of the active role it has taken and is taking to bring into being a Nuclear Navy.

Our reward has been to see the POLARIS nuclear submarine emerge as our first line of defense -- and the ENTERPRISE and its nuclear escort vessels perform admirably in support of our limited objectives in the Vietnam conflict.

The world into which the NARWHAL will sail is a world of conflict and contradictions.

We are engaged in a military struggle against the forces of communism in Southeast Asia. At the same time we are working with communist nations at Geneva to produce a treaty banning the spread of nuclear weapons -- a treaty which will lessen the possibility of a nuclear holocaust.

-3-

Our hopes and prayers are for a non-proliferation treaty and agreements -- agreements to halt the arms race -- and, indeed, agreements to eliminate all conflicts.

But we must understand military power and constantly be aware of the capabilities of our potential enemies. We must stay in tune with changing events.

A dramatic and upsetting event has recently taken place in the Far East. In less than three years Red China has become, not only a nuclear power -- but a thermonuclear power.

I suggest that they have made amazing and astonishing progress in this brief span of time. Their accomplishments in the field of nuclear weaponry are all the more significant because the internal strife within China has apparently had little or no effect on their nuclear and missile programs. In light of these factors, it appears that Communist China presents a clear-cut threat to the free world.

At the beginning of the 90th Congress, as Chairman of the Joint Committee, I initiated hearings on Red China's nuclear capability. One of the most significant findings contained in the Joint Committee report that followed was the statement based on CIA and Defense Department testimony that:

"... The Chinese probably will achieve an operational ICBM capability before 1972. Conceivably, it could be ready as early as 1970-1971."

Add to this new threat the fact that the Soviet Union's offensive nuclear striking power is increasing in comparison to our own -- while at the same time they are deploying one and probably two anti-ballistic missile systems to defend their country -- which we are not doing -- I repeat -- which we are not doing.

While for the moment we can find comfort and a certain amount of security in the ideological schism that exists between Red China and the Soviet Union, we cannot discount the possibility that this breach could be healed and thereby greatly affect the balance of nuclear power in the world.

Which brings me to the important point that I want to make here today, and that is this -- that the time has come for us to give serious and urgent thought to a reappraisal of our defense posture.

We cannot live in a world of atomic energy and discount completely the possibility of "surprise attack" on our Nation.

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The Senate has just recently approved a budget of over seventy billion dollars for defense, the largest single appropriations bill in our history -- and yet we have no effective anti-ballistic missile system.

I realize the cost to do this is high -- indeed staggering -- however, if we can afford to spend twenty-four billion dollars a year in defense of a neighbor, and I mean Vietnam, we can certainly spend as much to insure the life and security of our American society.

Our offensive weapons are second to none -- but it has been our announced and continuing policy for generations never to strike first.

Today -- in effect -- we are asking the American people to be prepared to accept near nuclear annihilation because our strategy calls for absorbing the first nuclear strike.

We are not an aggressive people. We do not covet other nations' territory. We only ask that those who desire to be free -- stay free. I merely point out that we must be as strong in defense to preserve our society as we must be strong in offense to discourage and deter an attack.

With all our offensive power, our defense posture could be our Achilles' heel.

We cannot sit back and let ourselves be lulled into a sense of false security, relying only on the hope that fear of retaliation will deter potential aggressors.

Development of an ABM system is, I repeat, extremely expensive but, indeed, necessary. In this kind of a world, the alternatives are few.

The security of our country -- the ultimate in its defense -- deserves the highest national priority.

An affluent America -- with so much to lose -- must not face this mortal challenge cheaply.

We should move full speed ahead on building an anti-ballistic missile system. In this connection, I am happy to say that Senator Henry M. Jackson of Washington, Chairman of the Subcommittee on Military Application of the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy, and one of the Senate's leading experts on military affairs, will soon hold hearings on the ABM question.

The Joint Committee on Atomic Energy will pursue the development of an ABM system with the same vigor that it pressed for the development of the H-Bomb and our first nuclear submarine, the NAUTILUS.

Both endeavors were successful and greatly increased the security of this great Nation.

This new submarine, the NARWHAL, represents another link in the chain of undersea security so necessary in this turbulent world.

It is into this difficult and dangerous world that you -- the officers and men of the NARWHAL -- will soon sail.

Your task is vital to our security.

Your mission will be difficult.

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Your dedication is unsurpassed and our pride in you is unbounded.